

# Notes on the Malachite Kingfisher *Corythornis* (*Alcedo*) *cristata*

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The taxonomic literature on *Corythornis cristata* is confusing. Peters (1945) recognised only 2 subspecies for continental Africa, one a *nomen nov.* (see below). He apparently followed Chapin (1939) and earlier authors in placing *C. c. galerita* (type locality Senegal) in the synonymy of nominate *cristata* (type locality Cape of Good Hope, South Africa). Neither Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1970) nor Colston & Curry-Lindahl (1986) recognised *galerita*. However, Fry *et al.* (1988) used that name for all populations of continental Africa except for those of southern Angola and southwestern Zambia south to the Cape of Good Hope. Examination of the 130 specimens in the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) revealed 3 identifiable populations in continental Africa as defined below. Fry *et al.* found no sexual dimorphism in size in this species, so because of small samples of some populations, measurements of the sexes were combined in Table 1.

## *Corythornis cristata cristata* (Pallas)

### *Synonyms.*

*Alcedo cristata* Pallas, 1764. (in Vroeg. Cat. Adumbr., p. 1); Cape of Good Hope.

*Alcedo cristata robertsi* Peters, 1945. *nomen nov.* for *Corythornis cristata longirostris* Roberts; Kabulabula, Chobe River, Bechuanaland (not *Alcedo longirostris* Radde 1884).

*Diagnosis.* Chin white; moustachial region, underparts and flanks pale rufous, belly and undertail coverts pale buff to whitish. Size larger (see Table 1).

*Range.* Nigeria east to Uganda and Kenya south to the Cape of Good Hope. 97 specimens examined.

*Remarks.* Chapin (1939), who only had a small portion of the series of specimens now available, only commented on size and apparently did not make colour comparisons.

## *Corythornis cristata galerita* (Muller)

### *Synonym.*

*Alcedo galerita* P. L. S. Muller, 1776. Natur. Syst., suppl. p. 94, Senegal.

*Diagnosis.* Underparts (adults and juveniles), including belly, darker rufous, and dorsally darker blue than *cristata*; size smaller (see Table 1).

*Range.* Senegal south and east to Liberia, probably east to Ghana, but only specimens (13) from Sierra Leone and Liberia examined.

TABLE 1

Measurements of *Corythornis cristata* (with number, range, mean in mm), and standard deviation. Culmens were measured from the anterior edge of the nostril

	Wing chord				Culmen			
	No.	Range	Mean	SD	No.	Range	Mean	SD
<i>galerita</i>	9	51–53	(51.8)	1.16	8	23.1–26.2	(24.7)	1.11
<i>stuartkeithi</i>	20	53–60	(56.9)	1.81	20	23.2–27.7	(25.0)	1.22
<i>cristata</i>								
Kenya & Uganda	16	54–59	(56.6)	1.67	16	24.5–28.0	(26.6)	1.10
<i>cristata</i>								
southern Africa	7	55–60	(57.3)	1.88	8	24.1–29.8	(27.1)	1.99

*Remarks.* None of 18 juvenile *cristata* is as deeply coloured ventrally as the 3 available young of *galerita*.

### ***Corythornis cristata stuartkeithi* subsp. nov.**

*Type.* Adult ♂. AMNH 636679. Collected at “Arba-Schiko (Anseba R) Abyss” [=Anseba watercourse, Eritrea, northern Ethiopia], on 13 March 1907, by G. Schrader. Collector’s number 115.

*Description.* Similar to *galerita* in having entire venter rufous, including the undertail coverts; but in series the rufous somewhat paler. Somewhat paler blue dorsally especially on rump than *galerita*. Size larger (Table 1).

*Range.* Sudan (Blue Nile) and Ethiopia (Eritrea and southeast). 21 specimens examined.

*Remarks.* Two juvenile *stuartkeithi* are paler ventrally and thus are more like *cristata*; however, they appear to have less greyish wash across the breast than in young *galerita* and in most young *cristata*.

Note that the range of rufous-bellied *stuartkeithi* is separated from that of the smaller, darker rufous-bellied *galerita* by the northern portion of the range of the pale-bellied *cristata*.

This subspecies is named for Stuart Keith in recognition of his efforts towards the completion of the monumental contribution “The Birds of Africa”.

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